

## Remarks on United States Military and Diplomatic Strategies for Afghanistan and Pakistan

*December 16, 2010*

Good morning, everybody. When I announced our new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan last December, I directed my national security team to regularly assess our efforts and to review our progress after 1 year. That's what we've done consistently over the course of the past 12 months, in weekly updates from the field, in monthly meetings with my national security team, and in my frequent consultations with our Afghan, Pakistani, and coalition partners. And that's what we've done as part of our annual review, which is now complete.

I want to thank Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates for their leadership. Since Joint Chief of Staff Chairman Admiral Mullen is in Afghanistan, I'm pleased that we're joined by Vice Chairman General Cartwright.

Our efforts also reflect the dedication of Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, whose memory we honor and whose work we'll continue. Indeed, the tributes to Richard that have poured in from around the globe speak to both the enormous impact of his life and to the broad international commitment to our shared efforts in this critical region.

I have spoken with President Karzai of Afghanistan as well as President Zardari of Pakistan and discussed our findings and the way forward together. Today I want to update the American people on our review, our assessment of where we stand and areas where we need to do better. I want to be clear: This continues to be a very difficult endeavor. But I can report that thanks to the extraordinary service of our troops and civilians on the ground, we are on track to achieve our goals.

It's important to remember why we remain in Afghanistan. It was Afghanistan where Al Qaida plotted the 9/11 attacks that murdered 3,000 innocent people. It is the tribal regions along the Afghan-Pakistan border from which terrorists have launched more attacks against our homeland and our allies. And if an even wider insurgency were to engulf Afghanistan, that

would give Al Qaida even more space to plan these attacks.

And that's why, from the start, I've been very clear about our core goal. It's not to defeat every last threat to the security of Afghanistan, because ultimately, it is Afghans who must secure their country. And it's not nation-building, because it is Afghans who must build their nation. Rather, we are focused on disrupting, dismantling, and defeating Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan and preventing its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future.

In pursuit of our core goal, we are seeing significant progress. Today, Al Qaida's senior leadership in the border region of Afghanistan and Pakistan is under more pressure than at any point since they fled Afghanistan 9 years ago. Senior leaders have been killed. It's harder for them to recruit, it's harder for them to travel, it's harder for them to train, it's harder for them to plot and launch attacks. In short, Al Qaida is hunkered down. It will take time to ultimately defeat Al Qaida, and it remains a ruthless and resilient enemy bent on attacking our country. But make no mistake: We are going to remain relentless in disrupting and dismantling that terrorist organization.

In Afghanistan, we remain focused on the three areas of our strategy: our military effort to break the Taliban's momentum and train Afghan forces so they can take the lead, our civilian effort to promote effective governance and development, and regional cooperation, especially with Pakistan, because our strategy has to succeed on both sides of the border.

Indeed, for the first time in years, we've put in place the strategy and the resources that our efforts in Afghanistan demand. And because we've ended our combat mission in Iraq and brought home nearly 100,000 of our troops from Iraq, we're in a better position to give our forces in Afghanistan the support and equipment they need to achieve their missions. And our drawdown in Iraq also means that today

there are tens of thousands fewer Americans deployed in harm's way than when I took office.

With those additional forces in Afghanistan, we are making considerable gains toward our military objectives. The additional military and civilian personnel that I ordered in Afghanistan are now in place, along with additional forces from our coalition, which has grown to 49 nations. Along with our Afghan partners, we've gone on the offensive, targeting the Taliban and its leaders and pushing them out of their strongholds.

As I said when I visited our troops in Afghanistan earlier this month, progress comes slowly and at a very high price in the lives of our men and women in uniform. In many places, the gains we've made are still fragile and reversible. But there is no question we are clearing more areas from Taliban control and more Afghans are reclaiming their communities.

To ensure Afghans can take responsibility, we continue to focus on training. Targets for the growth of Afghan security forces are being met. And because of the contributions of additional trainers from our coalition partners, I'm confident we will continue to meet our goals.

I would add that much of this progress—the speed with which our troops deployed this year, the increase in recruits—in recruiting and training of Afghan forces, and the additional troops and trainers from other nations—much of this is the result of us having sent a clear signal that we will begin the transition of responsibility to Afghans and start reducing American forces next July.

This sense of urgency also helped galvanize the coalition around the goals that we agreed to at the recent NATO summit in Lisbon that we are moving toward a new phase in Afghanistan, a transition to full Afghan lead for security that will begin early next year and will conclude in 2014, even as NATO maintains a long-term commitment to training and advising Afghan forces. Now, our review confirms, however, that for these security gains to be sustained over time, there is an urgent need for political and economic progress in Afghanistan.

Over the past year, we've dramatically increased our civilian presence, with more diplo-

rats and development experts working alongside our troops, risking their lives and partnering with Afghans. Going forward, there must be a continued focus on the delivery of basic services, as well as transparency and accountability. We will also fully support an Afghan political process that includes reconciliation with those Taliban who break ties with Al Qaida, renounce violence and accept the Afghan Constitution. And we will forge a new strategic partnership with Afghanistan next year, so that we make it clear that the United States is committed to the long-term security and development of the Afghan people.

Finally, we will continue to focus on our relationship with Pakistan. Increasingly, the Pakistani Government recognizes that terrorist networks in its border regions are a threat to all our countries, especially Pakistan. We've welcomed major Pakistani offensives in the tribal regions. We will continue to help strengthen Pakistanis' capacity to root out terrorists. Nevertheless, progress has not come fast enough. So we will continue to insist to Pakistani leaders that terrorist safe havens within their borders must be dealt with.

At the same time, we need to support the economic and political development that is critical to Pakistan's future. As part of our strategic dialogue with Pakistan, we will work to deepen trust and cooperation. We'll speed up our investment in civilian institutions and projects that improve the lives of Pakistanis. We'll intensify our efforts to encourage closer cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

And next year, I look forward to an exchange of visits, including my visit to Pakistan, because the United States is committed to an enduring partnership that helps deliver improved security, development, and justice for the Pakistani people.

Again, none of these challenges that I've outlined will be easy. There are more difficult days ahead. But as a nation, we can draw strength from the service of our fellow Americans.

On my recent visit to Afghanistan, I visited a medical unit and pinned Purple Hearts on some of our wounded warriors. I met with a platoon that had just lost six of their teammates. Despite

the tough fight, despite all their sacrifice, they continue to stand up for our security and for our values that we hold so dear.

We're going to have to continue to stand up. We'll continue to give our brave troops and civilians the strategy and resources they need to succeed. We will never waver from our goal of disrupting, dismantling, and ultimately defeating Al Qaida. We will forge enduring partnerships with people who are committed to progress and to peace. And we will continue to do everything in our power to

ensure the security and the safety of the American people.

So with that, Vice President Biden and myself will depart, and I'm going to turn it over to Secretaries Clinton, Gates, as well as Vice Chairman Cartwright, and they will be able to answer your questions and give you a more detailed briefing.

Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

## Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Long Branch Elementary School in Arlington, Virginia

December 17, 2010

[Prior to his remarks, the President read aloud to the assembled students from two books.]

*The President.* Now, let me just say one more thing, and then maybe we can take a picture together. One of the things about Christmas obviously is getting presents and having stockings full and spending time with your family and eating good stuff. But part of the Christmas spirit is also making sure that we're kind to each other and we're thinking about people who aren't as lucky as we are.

And so I hope that all of you, even as you're having a lot of fun during the holidays, whether it's Christmas or Hanukkah, I want to make sure that all of you are also thinking about how can you guys be nicer to each other and think about people who have less than you do, because not everybody is as lucky as we are. There are a lot of kids out there who they may not be able to get a lot of presents for Christmas because their parents don't have a lot of money.

There are a lot of parents right now who are maybe away from their families. Some of them are in our military and they're fighting overseas, and so they can't be home for Christmas or the holidays. So I hope you guys think about them too, all right? And I want you all to remember that the spirit of Christmas is making sure

that—not just that you're getting something from somebody, but that you're also giving back to other people. Does that make sense?

*Students.* Yes.

*The President.* Who wants to take a picture with me?

[At this point, the students took a picture with the President.]

*The President.* Okay, so—now, is today the last day of school before the holidays?

*Students.* No!

*The President.* The teachers are all, like, “No.” [Laughter] When do you guys get out?

*Students.* On the 23d.

*The President.* Not until Wednesday, huh? All right. Well, listen, I hope you guys have so much fun during the holidays. And I'm so proud of you. You guys are all working hard in school and learning all kinds of stuff. It's really exciting to see you guys doing so well.

So—and I want to thank all the teachers and the faculty, the staff who are here, because I know that you guys put your heart and soul into doing this great work.

You guys have a couple questions for me before I go? I thought so.

What's your question?